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Reagan sees turnabout on Hill over Contra aid

By Mary Belcher
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The congressional "tide is turning" in favor of his request for \$100 million for Nicaraguan resistance fighters, President Reagan said yesterday, as spokesmen for the administration continued to reject the notion of a compromise on the aid package.

"This is an uphill battle in which we are engaged, but we are making progress," Mr. Reagan told a group of his supporters at a White House meeting. "You can sense that the tide is turning in favor of the democratic resistance."

"Far-sighted Democrats and Republicans are coming together in a realization of the common danger of Nicaragua's Marxist Sandinista regime," the president said. "On this issue we must act not as Republicans or not as Democrats, but as Americans."

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Republican lawmakers yesterday afternoon to discuss his proposal. He will have more meetings each day until the House votes on the Nicaraguan aid package March 19.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said the administration is not discussing a compromise aid package with members of Congress.

"The president has made his proposal," Mr. Speakes said. "The president stands where he stood when he made the proposal. He thinks it's the proper way to go. He doesn't want any halfway measures. He wants it like he proposed it."

Mr. Speakes said administration officials are aware of compromise plans taking shape on Capitol Hill, "but the administration has not sent any signals or made any proposals about compromise."

Among the alternative Nicaraguan aid packages being discussed by members of

Congress are plans to delay military aid to the resistance fighters until negotiations are given a final chance. Mr. Reagan has argued that only a show of force by the rebels will bring the Sandinista regime to the negotiating table.

Mr. Reagan spoke yesterday of a bipartisan "anti-communist coalition" that he said has gained ground on Capitol Hill in the last several years.

Striking a conciliatory stance, Mr. Reagan applauded Congress for maintaining a steady increase in the defense budget and aiding such countries as El Salvador and Angola.

"Only a few years ago to hope for all of this would have seemed to be asking for far too much," the president said. "What we're seeing is the end of the post-Vietnam syndrome — the return of realism about the communist danger."

At a Republican fund-raising dinner last night, Mr. Reagan said, "We never want to ask who lost Central America."

"We must work together — all of us in both parties — to see that it never happens," the president told GOP congressional leaders at the J.W. Marriott Hotel.

Mr. Reagan said everyone involved in the debate on Nicaragua "will be held accountable, if, because of an inability to act, our country is put into jeopardy."

Today, a former high-ranking member of the Sandinista government is scheduled to outline alleged narcotics trafficking by Nicaraguan government officials.

Alvaro Baldizon, former deputy to Sandinista Minister of Interior Tomas Borge, will appear before the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Task Force on International Narcotics Control. Mr. Baldizon, who defected to the United States eight months ago, has publicly implicated associates of Mr. Borge in international drug trafficking, particularly cocaine.

Mr. Baldizon's testimony is expected to substantiate charges made by President Reagan and other administration officials that the Nicaraguan government is involved in narcotics trafficking to the United States.

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, earlier this month told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that intelligence sources photographed an associate of Mr. Borge unloading cocaine at an airstrip in Nicaragua.

The Sandinista government has been accused of trafficking in cocaine and then using the profits to fund its military forces.